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Copter Plucks 2 From Jail in Mexico

By United Press International

MEXICO CITY, Aug. 19—A small blue helicopter landed in the courtyard of Santa Maria Acatitla Federal Prison last night, and guards assumed a visiting dignitary would step out. Instead, the police said today, a convicted American murderer and a Venezuelan counterfeiter scrambled aboard and escaped.

The police placed prison officials under arrest today and issued an alert for another American believed to have engineered the spectacular escape from the maximum security prison.

They identified the escaped convicts as Joel David Kaplan, 42 years old, a former New York millionaire importer serving a 23-year term for murder, and his cellmate, Carlos Antonio Contreras Castro of Venezuela, who was serving a sentence for counterfeiting and forgery. Kaplan had been convicted of the murder in 1961 of a Puerto Rican, Luis M. Vidal.

Airfields Alerted

A police spokesman said the man believed to have engineered the escape and perhaps ot have piloted the helicopter was an American, whom they identified as Orville Dale.

Mr. Dale visited Kaplan at the prison yesterday only a few hours before the escape.

The unmarked helicopter was set down in the prison yard during a heavy rain. "It was all a question of a few minutes," one guard said.

The warden, José Luis Campos Burgos, said that "all those responsible for the custody and security of the jail" had been placed under arrest while the escape was being investigated.

The police sent out a general alert to all Mexican airfields and extra vigilance was reported on both the United States and the Guatemalan borders. There were reports the two might try to flee to Honduras or Venezuela.

Prison officials said that both Kaplan and Contreras Castro had attempted to escape from the maximum security prison last February hidden in a tuck, but were discovered. They were not disciplined, the officials said.

Police agents were sent to a private airfield at Venta Prieta, about 100 miles north of Mexico City, where a helicopter answering the description of the getaway craft was seen Tuesday. The helicopter disappeared from the international airport radar screen yesterday as it headed south over the mountains that surround Mexico City.

Kaplan, who never admitted guilt, was the owner of a molasses importing firm in New York. He is the nephew of J.M. Kaplan, president of the J.M. Kaplan Fund of New York. Testimony before the United States Congress in 1964 described the fund as a philanthropic organization created as a conduit for Central Intelligence Agency funds.